



## In Focus

### Chairman of Committees: Proposed Changes

The recent report of the Leader's Group on Governance, [Governance of Domestic Committees in the House of Lords](#) (14 January 2016, HL Paper 81 of session 2015–16), recommended that the current responsibilities of the Chairman of Committees be split between two new chairs of a proposed new Services Committee and a new Finance Committee, and a third new post, titled Senior Deputy Speaker, which would “focus on matters relating to proceedings of the House”.<sup>1</sup>

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#### Current Responsibilities of the Chairman of Committees

On 23 July 1800, the House resolved that it would, at the commencement of every session, proceed to nominate a Chairman of Committees.<sup>2</sup> The [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#) confirms that, “at the beginning of every session, and whenever a vacancy occurs, a Member is appointed by the House to fill the salaried office of Chairman of Committees”.<sup>3</sup> It adds that the post holder is “chairman ex officio of all committees unless the House otherwise directs. In practice this means that he chairs the following “domestic” committees: Administration and Works Committee; Liaison Committee; Committee for Privileges and Conduct; Procedure Committee; Refreshment Committee; and Committee of Selection”.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the post holder “speaks and answers questions in the House on matters relating to the internal administration of the House and the work of any domestic committee”; “exercises general supervision and control over private bills and hybrid instruments”; and is the first of the Deputy Speakers, therefore “empowered, in the absence of the Lord Speaker, to recall the House during a period of adjournment”.<sup>5</sup>

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#### Recommendations for Change: Leader's Group on Governance

In its report, the [Leader's Group on Governance](#) proposed a “smaller number of [domestic] committees, with clear demarcations of responsibility, formal delegations of authority, and a clear hierarchy”.<sup>6</sup> To give effect to the suggested changes, the Group recommended the creation of the following:

- A senior committee to set the strategy of the House and the Administration and to monitor the performance of the Administration against agreed targets.
- Two supporting committees, one dealing with all aspects of services for members to be called the ‘Services Committee’; the other a Finance Committee.
- Three new posts: a chair for each of the Services Committee and the Finance Committee, and a new role entitled Senior Deputy Speaker, to replace the Chairman of Committees.<sup>7</sup>

In relation to the effect that the proposed changes would have on the post of Chairman of Committees, the Group's report stated:

The structure which we have outlined, and in particular the creation of two new chairs for the two supporting committees, clearly implies a re-thinking of the current role of the Chairman of Committees. We propose that, alongside the creation of new posts to chair the Services Committee and Finance Committee, a third new post is created in place of the Chairman of Committees to focus on matters relating to proceedings of the House. He or she will deputise for the Lord Speaker, and chair the Procedure Committee, the Committee for Privileges and Conduct, the Liaison Committee and the Committee of Selection. The transfer of responsibility for administration, works, catering and retail to the chair of the new Services Committee will allow this new post to concentrate on areas of procedure and conduct. He or she would be a member of the senior committee to ensure a flow of information between that committee and the committees concerned with procedure and privilege.

In order to avoid confusion with the chairs of the two new committees and to emphasise the importance of this third new post we suggest a new title of Senior Deputy Speaker.<sup>8</sup>

The Group also recommended that the salary currently attached to the post of Chairman of Committees be reviewed as a result of the "significant alleviation of duties" which would result from adoption of its proposals for change.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Group recommended that, should the post of Senior Deputy Speaker be created, the formal title of the Principal Deputy Chairman of Committees should be changed to Chair of the European Union Committee.<sup>10</sup> This change, the Group argued, would have the "merit of describing the work that is undertaken" by the post holder.<sup>11</sup>

The House has yet to consider the Leader's Group report or the proposals outlined above.

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## Further Information

- House of Lords Library, [Principal Office Holders in the House of Lords](#), 19 March 2015
- Leader's Group on Governance, [Governance of Domestic Committees in the House of Lords](#), 14 January 2016, HL Paper 81 of session 2015–16

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<sup>1</sup> Leader's Group on Governance, [Governance of Domestic Committees in the House of Lords](#), 14 January 2016, HL Paper 81 of session 2015–16, p 21.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'The Chairman of Committees in the Lords', *Times*, 24 June 1911.

<sup>3</sup> House of Lords, [Companion to the Standing Orders and Guide to the Proceedings of the House of Lords](#), 2015, p 28.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, pp 28–9.

<sup>6</sup> Leader's Group on Governance, [Governance of Domestic Committees in the House of Lords](#), 14 January 2016, HL Paper 81 of session 2015–16, p 3.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p 21.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p 26.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p 21.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

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